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California Policy Options

Title

Introduction

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Introduction

A recent *Los Angeles Times* poll reports that Californians are increasingly pleased with the direction of the state. The California economy is booming in many sectors and regions. Urban riots and (for the moment) major earthquakes are receding in memory. Employment is expanding. Aerospace, once a leading sector during the Cold War, is being replaced by entertainment, multimedia, bio-tech, and high-tech electronics, computers, and software. The depression of home prices has reversed. The rise in public optimism should be no surprise, given these developments.

Improvement of the business cycle is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many longer-term public policy issues remain on the table, although booming conditions can certainly assist in addressing the state's problems. Controversies remain over such issues as immigration, educational quality, the transition from welfare to work, traffic congestion and transportation, and crime control. These issues often are intertwined. Current pressure to scrap the existing bilingual education system, for example, combines issues of educational quality with concerns about immigration. Unhappiness with the solutions political leaders have developed – or failed to develop – leads to experimentation with the instruments of government. Thus, we find the electorate willing to try term limits for elected office holders, restrictions on political contributions, and open primary voting.

California is by far the biggest state in the nation and is often a trend setter. Despite the stereotypes of the state that prevail nationally, however, California has long had a changing face. Today California is seen as the home of youth culture. But before World War II California was what Florida is today, a place where old folks came to retire in the sunshine. The wartime and Cold War booms attracted a mobile young workforce to the state in the 1940s and thereafter, changing California's age profile.

Today California is seen as the home of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. But before the 1960s California's cities (and especially Southern California) were more homogeneous than the urban centers of the east and midwest, with their immigrant populations. Changes in national immigration policy and population pressures in Mexico and elsewhere have produced California's contemporary demographic image.

It is change that generates tensions and new trends, particularly when combined with a political system that encourages direct electoral expression. Proposition 13 on property taxes, Proposition 187 on immigration and Proposition 209 on affirmative action all drew national attention. More such initiatives are inevitable.

California Policy Options is now in its second annual volume. This new series represents a collaboration of the UCLA Anderson Forecast and the School of Public Policy and Social Research. It is our intent to continue these yearly reviews of key issues facing the state. Our hope is to provide policy makers, students, and the general public with the latest thinking on California's problems and solutions.

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